

**Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States,
meeting within the Council, on sport as a platform for social inclusion through volunteering**

(2017/C 189/09)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EU AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

RECALLING THAT:

1. Sport is the largest social and voluntary activity in Europe. Many people take an interest in it and sport plays an important role in bringing people together from different backgrounds.
2. European societies are facing challenges to remain cohesive and inclusive. Volunteering in sport as an engagement in society may support social integration, contributes to active citizenship and can be used to tackle social exclusion ⁽¹⁾.
3. Volunteering in sport can create a stronger sense of belonging to society among vulnerable members of society. This can help contribute to promote active citizenship. These Council conclusions recognise the diversities within European society and aim to address groups at risk of marginalisation, namely migrants and refugees ⁽²⁾, seniors, persons with disabilities and vulnerable young people ⁽³⁾.

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT:

4. Even with only a slow recovery from the economic and financial crisis, a number of EU Member States have continued to fight poverty and social exclusion ⁽⁴⁾. Social inclusion requires equal treatment of all groups within society and a special focus on participation.
5. Conflicts, crises and unstable situations in third countries have resulted in an unprecedented increase in numbers of migrants and refugees ⁽⁵⁾ in Europe since 2010, sparking a migrant and refugee crisis in Europe, with EU Member States struggling to cope with the influx.
6. The joint declaration of the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament on the EU's legislative priorities for 2017 aims at addressing the most urgent challenges the EU faces today. The joint declaration sets out six specific areas which should be treated as a priority. Addressing the social dimension of the EU and reforming and developing EU migration policy are amongst these six priority areas ⁽⁶⁾.
7. Volunteering in sport can reach people at international, national, regional and local level, encourage active citizenship and can also be a powerful social tool in many areas. It can be used to help integrate the increasing migrant population, combat social exclusion or increase solidarity between generations, as well as contribute to gender equality. It plays an integral part in creating social cohesion and inclusive communities. In this regard, local authorities, in cooperation with sport clubs, associations and other entities who use sport as a method in their work, play a crucial role.

⁽¹⁾ Social exclusion is understood to mean the process which pushes people to the edge of society, which limits their access to resources and opportunities, curtails their participation in normal social and cultural life, leaving them feeling marginalized, powerless and discriminated against.

⁽²⁾ This document refers to the integration of migrants and refugees in line with the Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on the integration of third-country nationals legally residing in the EU adopted on 9 December 2016 (15312/16).

⁽³⁾ Groups that experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population. Ethnic minorities, migrants, disabled people, the homeless, those struggling with substance abuse, isolated elderly people and young people all often face difficulties that can lead to further social exclusion, such as low levels of education and unemployment or under employment.

⁽⁴⁾ Social Policy Reforms in the EU: A Cross-national Comparison Social Inclusion Monitor Europe (SIM) –Reform Barometer. Jan Arpe, Simona Milio, Andrej Stuchlik (Eds.)

⁽⁵⁾ White Paper on the future of Europe – Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025, p. 4 'The refugee crisis which saw 1,2 million people coming to Europe in 2015, is of a scale unprecedented since the Second World War' (see also footnote 3).

⁽⁶⁾ Joint declaration on annual inter institutional programming for 2017 – Approval, doc. 15375/16

8. Seniors represent an important and growing part of European society, economy, culture and lives. A combination of factors such as low income, poor health, old age and/or gender-based discrimination, reduced physical or mental capacity, unemployment, isolation, abuse, and limited access to services can all play a part in increasing the risk of poverty and social exclusion ⁽⁷⁾ for some within this group. Volunteering in sport can extract those affected from their isolation and lead them to share their experience, supporting an intergenerational dialogue.
9. Volunteering in sport, in addition to developing a variety of skills and competences, provides young people with opportunities in non-formal and informal learning through which they can acquire positive social attitudes based on values developed through sport ⁽⁸⁾. Volunteering in sport can also serve as a safety net for young people out of education or employment and on the margins of society ⁽⁹⁾.
10. Equal opportunities for persons with disabilities enables them to participate as sport volunteers on an equal basis with others ⁽¹⁰⁾. All persons with disabilities should have the right to full access to sports activities including being a volunteer ⁽¹¹⁾.

RECOGNISING THAT:

11. According to the Eurobarometer 2014, 7 % of EU citizens say that they engage in voluntary work that supports sport activities ⁽¹²⁾. The survey shows that a third of the respondents spend more than six hours a month volunteering, with 8 % giving 21 hours or more.
12. Volunteering plays a key role in including people within a community by strengthening the role of active citizens, increasing employability, and promoting values and intercultural dialogue. Voluntary activities in sport can take different forms and can be performed occasionally (for example, the preparation and organisation of local, regional, national and international sporting events) or on a more regular day-to-day basis (for example, activities carried out in running various sports bodies or associations active in the field of sport) ⁽¹³⁾.
13. There remains a lack of evidence to support policies in the area of social inclusion and volunteering in sport. To date there has been no systematic, cross-national study with a focus on the political conditions, economic and social implications and structural characteristics of sport associations, federations, clubs and other entities that promote social inclusion and volunteering in sport ⁽¹⁴⁾ ⁽¹⁵⁾.
14. The European Solidarity Corps aims at allowing more young people to participate in a wide range of solidarity activities through volunteering, employment, traineeships or apprenticeships, to help address challenging situations across Europe. It can help them to develop competences they need both on the labour market and for an active citizenship. This, in turn, could contribute to promoting social inclusion and European values ⁽¹⁶⁾.

INVITE MEMBER STATES TO:

15. Explore and endorse volunteering in sport as a platform for social inclusion. This can be done through supporting and encouraging local and regional authorities in cooperation with sport clubs and organisations, including non-governmental organisations, using sport as a method in their work to provide access to those people who are

⁽⁷⁾ Active Senior Citizens for Europe — A Guide to the EU (2012) AGE Platform Europe.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 24.

⁽⁹⁾ Promoting Inclusion and Fundamental Values through Formal and Non-Formal Learning: EU Level measures to implement the Paris Declaration.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 326, 3.12.2010, p. 5.

⁽¹¹⁾ COM(2010) 636 final - European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe.

⁽¹²⁾ Sport and Physical Activity Special Eurobarometer 412 (2014)

⁽¹³⁾ Expert Group on Human Resources Development and Sport. Recommendations to encourage volunteering in sport, best practices on legal and fiscal mechanisms.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Project 'Social Inclusion and volunteering in sports clubs in Europe' (SIVSCE) with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (2015-2017).

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Sport Inclusion Network (ESPIN) - Promoting Equal Opportunities of Migrants and Minorities through Volunteering in Sport.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.

socially excluded. This would serve to promote and develop innovative ways in which to encourage social inclusion of minorities and vulnerable groups, including isolated seniors, vulnerable young people, persons with disability, migrants and refugees, by promoting volunteering in sport, thereby equipping such minorities with new skills and instilling in them sport as a lifestyle.

16. Promote volunteering in sport amongst people from all spheres of society including migrants, senior citizens, persons with disabilities and vulnerable young people.
17. Develop and promote volunteering in sport as a valued educational concept to be included across the different levels of informal and non-formal learning, involving youth and sport organisations and other civil society stakeholders and strengthening cooperation amongst them. This could involve educational programmes in cooperation with sports organisations which highlight the benefits of physical and mental well-being as well as the importance of volunteers within sport.
18. Promote volunteering through the organisation of major sport events in partnership with the sport movement. Major sport events can offer a great opportunity to create suitable conditions to train volunteers, helping them acquire necessary competences.

INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

19. Support the exchange of good practices and knowledge relating to volunteering in sport across all EU Member States, in view of the contribution and impact that volunteering in sport has on social inclusion.
20. Consider supporting transnational initiatives (e.g. exchange of good practice, studies, networks, projects) focusing on the implementation of national and international strategic actions on social inclusion within the framework of EU funding programmes, especially Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund, with a focus on volunteering in sport.

INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND MEMBER STATES WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE TO:

21. Consider the European Week of Sport as an initiative to promote volunteering in sport and engage individuals from all parts of society. It can be a means to reach all sections of society through activities in deprived areas and attracting sports volunteers within these areas.
22. Promote the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning gained through volunteering in sport, in particular through the use of European tools and guidance⁽¹⁷⁾ that can facilitate validation and improve comparability, transparency and better recognition of acquired learning outcomes. The aim would be to examine how to reinforce the status of volunteers in order to ensure recognition of the competences they have acquired.
23. Promote use of the Structural and Investment Funds and the Cohesion Fund for infrastructure as well as other programmes for sport clubs to improve prevailing social conditions especially in those areas with a high concentration of groups at risk of marginalisation.
24. Promote the concept of the European Solidarity Corps among sport organisations and encourage them to take part in this initiative, so that young people who are active in the field of sport can have better access to this programme.

INVITE THE SPORTS MOVEMENT TO CONSIDER:

25. Encouraging the inclusion of migrants and refugees, seniors, persons with disabilities, vulnerable young people in various volunteering roles within grassroots sports activities through the organisation of small and major sports events and making the entry into the field of volunteering in sport within grassroots sport more accessible in order to empower these individuals.
26. Developing cooperation with sport organisations, youth organisations and other non-governmental organisations on how to promote, engage and retain volunteers in order to maximize opportunities for volunteering in sport, for instance in the framework of major sport events.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1).

27. Creating learning and training opportunities to improve the skills of sports organisation staff volunteers including migrants and refugees, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, vulnerable young people and other minorities, while at the same time addressing the capacity building of those responsible for recruiting and managing diverse groups of volunteers.
 28. Encouraging equal opportunities in sports clubs, including the equal treatment of groups at risk of marginalisation in respect of membership and participation as club volunteers.
 29. Promoting the involvement of seniors in sport clubs and the integration of senior volunteers, using their valuable life experience within sports structures at all levels.
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ANNEX

The following key documents highlight the importance of volunteering in sport as a tool for social inclusion:

1. The Europe 2020 Strategy and one of its seven flagship initiatives, which emphasizes the need for growth and job creation that will help people who are on the poverty line and socially excluded to live in dignity and take an active part in the society (7110/10).
 2. Council conclusions of 18 November 2010 on the role of sport as a source of and a driver for active social inclusion (OJ C 326, 3.12.2010, p. 5).
 3. Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the EU (COM(2011) 568 final).
 4. Council conclusions on the role of voluntary activities in sport in promoting active citizenship (OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 24).
 5. Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1).
 6. The EU Work Plan for Sport 2014-2017 (OJ C 183, 14.6.2014, p. 12).
 7. Sport and Physical Activity Special Eurobarometer 412 (2014).
 8. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A New Skills Agenda for Europe: Working to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness (doc. 10038/16).
 9. The Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on the integration of third-country nationals legally residing in the EU adopted on 9 December 2016 (doc. 15312/16).
 10. Joint declaration on annual interinstitutional programming for 2017 (doc. 15375/16).
 11. Investing in Europe's Youth
 - (a) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Investing in Europe's Youth (doc. 15420/16).
 - (b) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — A European Solidarity Corps (doc. 15421/16).
 12. Expert Group on Human Resources Development and Sport. Recommendations to encourage volunteering in sport, best practices on legal and fiscal mechanisms (December 2016).
 13. European Sport Inclusion Network (ESPIN) - Promoting Equal Opportunities of Migrants and Minorities through Volunteering in Sport.
 14. COM(2010) 636 final — European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe.
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